

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information providing system comprising:
a plurality of information sources each having
5 both an information providing function of providing
information upon receipt of a request for providing
information and an index output function of outputting an
individual index representative of an information group
capable of being provided by oneself;
10 a retrieval engine having an index construction
function of finally receiving at least one individual index
outputted by the index output function of at least one
information source to construct a general index
representative of information group capable of being
15 provided by at least one information source, and an
information retrieval function of retrieving information
upon receipt of a request for retrieving information with
the general index constructed by the index construction
function; and
20 a mediating apparatus intervening between said
information sources and said retrieval engine adapted for
receiving a plurality of individual indexes outputted from
said plurality of information sources to select an
individual index satisfying a predetermined index selection
25 condition from among the plurality of individual indexes
thus received, said mediating apparatus sending the
selected individual index to said retrieval engine for use

in the index construction function.

2. A mediating apparatus comprising:

an index receiving section for receiving a
5 plurality of individual indexes outputted by a plurality of
information sources each having both an information
providing function of providing information upon receipt of
a request for providing information and an index output
function of outputting an individual index representative
10 of an information group capable of being provided by
oneself;

an index selection section for selecting an
individual index satisfying a predetermined index selection
condition from among the plurality of individual indexes
15 received by said index receiving section; and

an index sending section for sending the
individual index selected by said index selection section
to a retrieval engine for use in an index construction
function, said retrieval engine having the index
20 construction function of finally receiving at least one
individual index outputted by the index output function of
at least one information source to construct a general
index representative of information group capable of being
provided by at least one information source, and an
25 information retrieval function of retrieving information
upon receipt of a request for retrieving information with
the general index constructed by the index construction

function.

3. A mediating apparatus according to claim 2,
wherein a plurality of said retrieval engines is provided,
5 said mediating apparatus further comprises an
index selection condition storage section for storing the
index selection condition in association with said
retrieval engine upon receipt of a request for registration
of the index selection condition by said retrieval engine,
10 said index selection section selects an individual
index satisfying an index selection condition stored in
said index selection condition storage section, and
 said index sending section sends the individual
index selected by said index selection section to a
15 retrieval engine associated with the index selection
condition used in selection of the individual index, of the
plurality of retrieval engines.

4. A mediating apparatus according to claim 2,
20 wherein said information sources each has, as the index
output function, a function of receiving a push program
defining a method of producing and outputting the
individual index to produce and output the individual index
in accordance with the method defined by the push program,
25 and
 said mediating apparatus further comprises a
program receiving section for receiving the push program,

a program selection section for selecting a push program satisfying a predetermined program selection condition from among the push programs received by said program receiving section, and

5 a program sending section for sending the push program selected by said program selection section to said information source for use in the index output function.

10 5. A mediating apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said mediating apparatus further comprises a program selection condition storage section for storing the program selection condition in association with said information source upon receipt of a request for registration of the program selection condition by said
15 information source,

said program selection section selects a push program satisfying a program selection condition stored in said program selection condition storage section, and

20 said program sending section sends the push program selected by said program selection section to an information source associated with the program selection condition used in selection of the push program.